Identifying Priority Oyster Restoration Projects in the Barataria-Terrebonne Basins

Gulf of Mexico Program's Shellfish Challenge: March 1997 Project Update

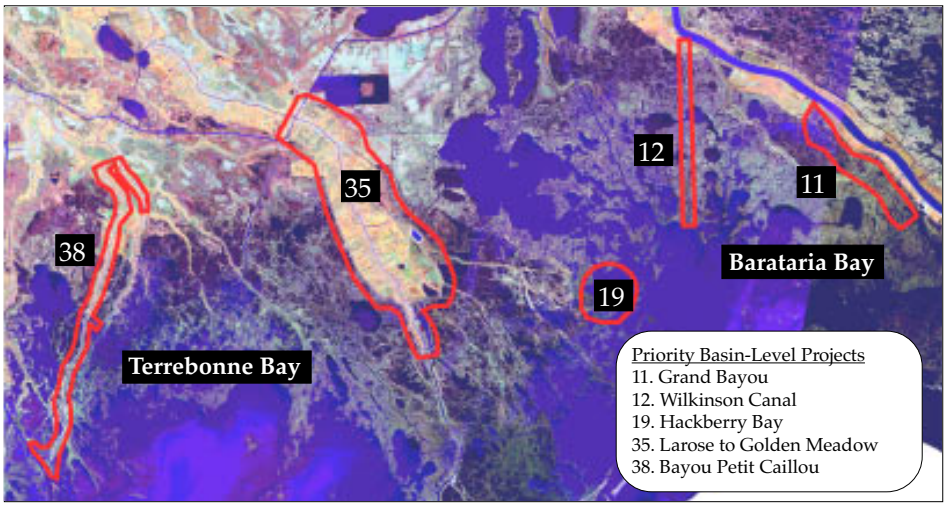
An Oyster Restoration Project Targeting Workshop, co-hosted by the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program, EPA's Gulf of Mexico Program, Nicholls State University, and NOAA's Strategic Environmental Assessments Division, was held in Thibodaux, LA on February 24 and 25, 1997. Over 60 attendees representing parish governments, the oyster industry, state and federal agencies, academia, local environmental organizations and other interested stakeholders, worked together to nominate ***eight priority oyster restoration projects*** *from an initial list of 61 candidates. Each project, if implemented, will lead to progress in meeting the Gulf Program's Shellfish Challenge. The next step in moving these projects forward is to identify local champions, stakeholders, and key decisionmakers for each project, and to assess in more detail the factors affecting feasibility.*

Workshop Goals

The objectives of the Oyster Restoration Project Targeting Workshop were to: 1) select a small number of oyster restoration projects, **with at least one from each parish**, to be taken forward to a more detailed assessment of implementation feasibility; and 2) begin discussions of the obstacles and solutions for implementing these projects.

The workshop represents the second of three major activities that comprise the Barataria/Terrebonne Implementation Assessment which is part of the Shellfish Challenge Project (see insert). The first activity was a series of four Stakeholder Meetings held in November 1996 during which participants identified 102 candidate restoration projects in the Barataria and Terrebonne basins. The 102 projects were consolidated into 61 projects prior to the workshop by eliminating duplicate suggestions and combining similar projects. The third activity will be the "implementation feasibility assessments" for the priority oyster restoration projects.

By focusing on solutions, rather than problems, participants achieved the goals of the workshop.



The five geographically targeted projects in the Barataria-Terrebonne basins.

Workshop Process

The workshop was conducted in three sessions. First, participants heard brief summaries of the 61 candidate projects, presented by basin. Twenty-five projects were located in the Barataria basin, 27 in the Terrebonne basin, and nine projects were considered to be basinwide in their impact. The shellfish growing water classification process was described, and project selection criteria presented. Participants were then asked to prioritize the projects by voting for six projects in each basin, and two basinwide projects.

The projects identified by this voting process then formed the basis for basin-level breakout sessions. In these sessions, facilitated by local experts, participants used a standard set of criteria related to the potential to increase productive shellfish areas, the potential to build project support, cost and financing, and impacts on water quality and public health to guide their discussions. The projects selected formed the basis for the third workshop session—discussing the obstacles to implementing projects.

What is the Shellfish Challenge?

The goal of the Gulf of Mexico Program's Shellfish Challenge Project is to "increase Gulf shellfish beds available for safe harvest by 10 percent." Since 1995, the Program has worked to bring together federal, state, and local stakeholders using strategic assessment to examine the problems causing harvest limitations of shellfish growing waters, and identify solutions on a regional scale. The Program is now working to translate these regional strategies into action within priority watersheds through initiatives such as the Barataria/Terrebonne Implementation Assessment.

Results

The priority projects selected by the workshop participants are shown on the map above, and in the table (next page). Although only the top eight projects will be carried forward in the final phase, the overall inventory of 61 projects represents a robust set of oyster restoration opportunities for future evaluation.

Barataria Basin Projects. Although a goal in each breakout had been to select two geographically targeted projects, one in each parish, and one basinwide project, participants in the Barataria breakout group felt there were three geographically targeted projects that should go forward, two in Plaquemines and one in Jefferson Parish. The two Plaquemines Parish projects involve assessing malfunctioning individual wastewater treatment systems (IWWTS) in the Grand Bayou area (Project 11), and working to reduce the impact of runoff from grazing lands adjacent to Wilkinson Canal (Project 12). In Jefferson Parish, cultch enhancement in the public seed ground in Hackberry Bay (Project 19) was seen as a top priority.

Priority Oyster Restoration Projects

Barataria Basin

#	Parish	Project Location/Description
11	Plaquemines	**Grand Bayou:** Connect poorly operating individual wastewater treatment systems (IWWTS) in this area to either a properly maintained community treatment system or WWTP, such as the facility at Port Sulfur.
12	Plaquemines	**Wilkinson Canal:** Reduce inputs of FCBs from grazing lands by reducing, rerouting, or treating the discharge from lands before discharging to Wilkinson Canal.
19	Jefferson	**Hackberry Bay:** Enhance cultch/substrate to increase oyster habitat and production.

Terrebonne Basin

38	Terrebonne	**Bayou Petit Caillou:** Connect poorly operating IWWTS to on-site alternative technologies or to a WWTP. The Houma South Plant is a good candidate because of its proximity, available capacity, and performance.
35	Lafourche	**Larose to Golden Meadow:** Reduce inputs of FCBs in runoff by rerouting stormwater discharge outfalls to adjacent wetlands, potentially on the west side of Golden Meadow.

Basinwide

32	—	**Revise the Shellfish Relay System:** Expand shellfish relay activities basinwide by identifying ways for local Parish personnel to supervise relay operations to help defray the cost of supervision.
31	—	**Improve Use of Marina Pumpouts:** Improve use of pumpout facilities by installing new pumpout stations where needed and increasing enforcement and public awareness of the problem.
56	—	**Mandate Community Treatment:** Mandate new developments to provide community treatment systems or provide/expand collection lines to existing community treatment systems or WWTPs.

Terrebonne Basin Projects. In the Terrebonne breakout group, reducing inputs of fecal coliform bacteria (FCB) from IWWTS along Bayou Petit Caillou (Project 38), and reducing inputs of FCB from stormwater runoff in Larose to Golden Meadow (Project 38) were top projects for that basin.

Basinwide Projects. Projects that could be implemented in both the Terrebonne and Barataria basins (basinwide), were also nominated by participants in each breakout group. The need to revise the shellfish relay system (Project 32) was seen as a top basinwide priority in the Barataria breakout while improving the use of marina pumpouts and reducing the impact of overboard discharges of wastewater from recreational and commercial vessels (Project 31) was seen as a priority in both breakouts. In the Terrebonne breakout, the need to promote the use and maintenance of community treatment systems in new housing developments (Project 56) was voted the top basinwide project.

The Obstacles and Solutions Panel explored ideas for implementing the priority projects.

Obstacles and Solutions

On the second day, a special Obstacles and Solutions Panel discussed the challenges and opportunities involved in implementing the projects, with particular focus on community support, engineering issues, and financing sources. The presentations were followed by a facilitated discussion of each of the eight priority projects. Key themes that were repeatedly raised during these discussions included the need to build community support, raise public awareness regarding the benefits of these projects through public education and outreach, find low-cost sources of financing, and involve all stakeholders.

Next Steps

Over the next few months, the project team will work to complete a number of activities related to the feasibility assessment. The team encourages the participation and input of any interested stakeholders in the next phase of the project. Contact names are listed at the end of this summary.

Project Characterization Profiles. These are the detailed profiles that assess benefits, costs, financing options, probability of improving harvest, etc. These profiles will be developed by the project team members and other interested stakeholders.

Implementation Feasibility Workshop. This workshop would provide an opportunity for key stakeholders and local decisionmakers to review and evaluate the potential to implement each of the eight projects, determine which should be supported, and identify one or more champions to lead the implementation effort. Alternatives to this workshop are also being explored.

Shellfish Challenge Internet Site. The project team is considering the development of a Shellfish Challenge Internet Site as a way to improve information exchange among project staff and the growing number of stakeholders involved in the Barataria/Terrebonne Implementation Assessment. It will also serve as a means to disseminate information about the Shellfish Challenge to a larger, Gulfwide audience.

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